

**OPENING STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE VERNON J. EHLERS
CHAIRMAN
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY AND STANDARDS
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**
GAO Report on NOAA's Weather Satellite Program
September 29, 2006
10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Thank you Chairman Boehlert. I am pleased the Committee is holding this hearing today on another of this nation's critical weather satellite programs: the next generation of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite, known as GOES-R.

But first, on the occasion of his last hearing as Chair, I thank my friend, Sherry Boehlert, for his incomparable leadership of our Committee. His unwavering support for science and technology, along with his easy manner and open-minded approach to every issue he tackles, has served this Committee, this Congress, and the American people well.

The fact that the last hearing of Chairman Boehlert's tenure is on this satellite program should help focus our attention on the importance of GOES-R, and how seriously we need to take our role in ensuring its success. NOAA has operated geostationary weather satellites since the 1970's. It is not hyperbole to say these satellites save lives – they help the National Weather Service to better understand and monitor severe weather events such as tornadoes and hurricanes and are critical to the timely delivery of the alerts and warnings that lead people to safety before disaster strikes.

The ongoing problems with other satellite programs have made it clear that we in Congress must take our oversight responsibilities seriously – failure to do so can cost our communities dearly. Therefore, I look forward to hearing what the Government Accountability Office will tell us today about the state of GOES-R, and how NOAA is applying lessons learned from past satellite programs. I also look forward to hearing from NOAA about what they see as the biggest challenges to the success of GOES-R, and – most importantly – how they will address those challenges. I am particularly concerned about how NOAA will move the program forward in light of the recent cancellation of HES, the Hyperspectral Environmental Suite. The way NOAA fills the gap left by this instrument will affect how our nation observes and forecasts weather for the next two decades, so it is critical that we get this right.

I believe that NOAA is earnest – they are trying to get this program right and I applaud their efforts so far. However, good intentions are not enough. I expect this hearing to be the beginning of an ongoing dialogue between NOAA, the GAO, and our Committee as we all work to ensure the success of this important program.

I thank our excellent witnesses for being here, and I yield back the balance of my time.